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Nupe religion is 'national', not 'universal'. Where the group equals the village community, the coincidence of validity and group is no longer entirely true. More precisely, the validity of the ritual holds on two different planes, both coinciding with and extending beyond the group boundaries. Thus every ritual is valid for the community which actually performs it, promising its various benefits to that congregation; and every ritual is further valid for the wider or widest group of which the congregation forms a part. This wider validity may again be of two kinds. First, the group performing the ritual may regard it as a task (a privileged task) apportioned to it within the embracing social unit, so that each performance is understood to contribute to the welfare of that unit and also affirms its existence; as we have seen, this is true of several rituals in the river area and, on the widest plane, of the rituals associated with Tsoede and the kingdom of Nupe.[1] Secondly, the community performing the ritual may merely know that other villages in the tribe or perhaps sub-tribe 'own' an identical observance; so that every performance will recall and confirm the existence of a larger human aggregate of like customs and beliefs. In the first case, then, the single village community sees itself as belonging to an embracing association in which it has a part to play; in the second, as belonging to a particular species of humanity. In either case the purely religious aims merge with notions of group existence and relationships.

2. THE PROMISE OF RITUAL

The discussion of the validity of rituals, which is bound up with the promises they hold out, leads us at once to the crucial questions—how do rituals fulfil their promise? and how do they convey the hope, or perhaps certainty, that their professed aims will in fact come true?

Consider that the rituals are being performed incessantly through the generations and have undoubtedly, at times at least, been followed by the desired results; thus there must be in existence a body of knowledge, empirical if misconstrued, bearing out the believed-in efficacy. Consider further that the fixed rituals are concerned mainly with 'ends' and 'new beginnings', that is, with the overall repetitiveness of natural life—with the cycles of the seasons, with birth, with the growing of crops, with the rise and fall of the river. This repetitiveness is well known empirically, independently of any belief in supernatural agencies. The

[1] We note the same principle of 'delegation' which also underlies Nupe priestship, though the 'privileged task' now falls, not to individuals, but to sections of the society at large or to groups within groups.

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traditional Nupe calendar shows this clearly, naming as it does the various parts of the year 'First rain', 'Nothing-but-rain', 'Growing-time', 'Hot time', 'Cold time'. If the rituals are meant to ensure that life goes on being what it has always been, they merely aim at preserving a normality which one knows to be such. In other words, if you accept that there should be such rituals, then you will find that their aims come true. Purely practically, the rituals would seem to be supererogatory efforts; yet just because they are so supererogatory they are also self-confirming. But the question of supererogation does not really arise; for the Nupe, like all people, are capable of thinking on different planes. On one plane, there is an empirical 'normality', valid for all ordinary intents and purposes. On another, this normality is part of divine creation, which includes, with the natural order of things, also that mystic order of which ritual is an item. It is not a question of one conditioning the other or being necessary for the other; the two belong together and to the same design; both exist, and fit. And from this fit, so conceived that it demonstrates itself in the familiar regularities of life, one derives, not merely hope or confidence, but certainty.

This is still an incomplete view both of the universe as the Nupe picture it and of the efficacy of their rituals. The former also contains accidents, and the latter are meant to secure also benefits beyond those vouched for by some summary 'normality'. This is true especially of the movable rituals which deal with unforseen contingencies; but the fixed rituals, too, aim at such things as freedom from illness, prolific childbirth, prosperity, the disappearance of evil, that is, at the control of uncertainties. Here the ritual efforts, no longer self-confirming, can only convey a hope or strengthen confidence.

The nature of ritual as the Nupe conceive it betrays the same wavering between hope and certainty. As we know, it is a procedure, a rule of acting, which actuates a portion of cosmic force. In this sense, then, it is a machine, set in motion and working towards predetermined results. At the same time the procedure belies its own efficacy; for part of it is a *prayer*, not an automatically effective spell, that is, an invocation and appeal. One begs God to bring about what the performance of the ritual acts are themselves trusted to bring about. I do not think that I have misread the paradox in this situation. The *mamma* ritual would seem to express it most clearly. For there one employs a 'medicine' which is in itself automatically powerful and masks which are equally charged with some autonomous force; yet one also prays—'May God cause . . .' Nor can this ambiguity be reduced by calling the prayer a request for divine blessing, without which the ritual